

THE ASSASSINS' CLUB

Astro the Seer Unearths a Remarkable Hashish Conspiracy

BY ALAN BRAGHAMPTON

Drawing by Karl Anderson

VALESKA, do you understand gargoyles?" Astro looked up from a book of Viollet-le-Duc's architectural drawings and glanced across to the pretty blond head. His assistant, busy with her card catalogue where she kept memoranda of the seer's famous cases, made a delightful picture against the dull crimson hangings of the wall.

She came over to him and looked down across his shoulder at the pictures of the grotesque stone monsters. "Why," she said, "I've seen those wonderful old ones on Notre Dame in Paris, that gaze down on the city roofs. I've always wondered why they placed them on beautiful churches."

"It's a deep question," said Astro, his eyes still on the engraving. "But to my mind they symbolize the ancient cult of Wonder. In the Middle Ages men really wondered; they didn't anticipate flying machines years before they were invented, as we moderns do. They took nothing for granted. Everything in life was a miracle."

Valeska dropped quietly into a seat to listen. Astro had many moods. Sometimes he was the dreamy, occult seer, cryptic, mysterious; again he was the alert man of affairs, keen, logical, worldly. She had seen him too in society, affable, bland, jocose. But in this introspective, whimsical, analytic mood she got nearest him and learned something of the true import of his life.

He went on, his eyes half-closed, his red silken robe enveloping him like a shroud, the diamond in his turban glittering as he moved his head. His olive skinned, picturesque face with its dark eyes was serene and quiet now. A little blue tailed lizard, one of Astro's many exotic fancies, frisked across the table. He caught it and held it as he talked.

IN the thirteenth century clergy and laity alike believed that the forces of good and evil were almost equally balanced. They worshiped the Almighty; but propitiated Satan as well; so these horrible beasts leered down from the cornices of the house of God, and watched the holy office of priests. The devil had his own litany, his own science. They were forbidden practices; but they flourished then among the most intellectual people as they flourish now among the most ignorant. Magic was then a science; now it is a fake. Still, man's chief desire is to get something for nothing,—to find a short cut to wisdom. The gargoyle is replaced by the dollar mark. So be it. One must earn one's living. Selah! I have spoken!"

He looked up with a smile and a boyish twinkle in his eyes. Then his businesslike, cynical self returned. He jumped up, tall and handsome, a picturesque oriental figure informed with the stirring life of the West.

"Valeska, I've been reading about the devil worshipers of Paris,—the black mass, infant sacrifices, and all that. That's an anachronistic cult. I'd like to know if there really is any genuine survival of the worship of Evil?"

Valeska shuddered. "Oh, that would be horrible!"

"But interesting." He clasped his hands behind him and gazed up at the silver starred ceiling. "I don't mean degeneracy or insanity, but a man that does evil for the love of it, as they did in the old days."

"I hate to have you talk like that!" Valeska put a hand on his arm.

"Very well, I won't." He snapped his fingers as if to rid himself of the thought, and walked into the reception room adjoining the great studio.

Valeska went back to her work. For some minutes she arranged her cards in their tin box; then, hearing voices outside, she looked up and listened. Then she walked softly across the heavy rugs and, touching a button in the mahogany wainscoting, passed through a secret door.

SCARCELY had she disappeared when Astro returned, ushering in a young woman stylishly dressed in brown. When she put aside her veil her face shone out like a portrait, vivid, instinct with grace and a delicate, rare, high bred beauty, full of character and force. Astro showed her a seat under the electric lamp.

"I thought you would help me if anyone could," she was saying, in continuation of her conversation in the reception room. "If it was anything less

vague, I'd speak to mother about it; but it's too strange and elusive. I'm sure he has not been drinking; I would notice that in other ways. And yet he is different, he is not himself. It frightens me."

"Have you spoken to him about it?" Astro asked.

"Yes; but he won't say anything. He evades it, and says he's all right. But I don't dare to marry him till I know what it is that has changed him. I know it seems disloyal to suspect him; but how can I help it?"

"What is Mr. Cameron's business?"

"He's a naval Lieutenant, in the construction department at the Brooklyn navyyard. And that is another reason why I'm worried. He has charge of work that is important and secret. If this thing—whatever it is—should affect his work, he'd be disgraced; he might even be dishonorably discharged."

"When have you noticed this peculiarity of his? At any particular time?"

"Usually on Sundays, when he generally comes

exception of my assistant, no one shall ever know that you came here."

YOUR assistant?" She looked at him doubtfully.

"Miss Wynne."

She seemed surprised. "A lady?" she asked; then, timidly, "Might I see her?"

"Certainly." Astro touched a bell.

In a moment Valeska appeared between the velvet portieres, and waited there, her pretty, sensitive face questioning his wish, her golden hair brightly illuminated from behind.

Miss Mannering walked to her impulsively and took her hand. "Might I speak to you for a moment?" she asked.

Valeska, giving Astro a glance, led the visitor into the reception room.

"I had no idea that Astro had a lady assistant," she said. "I feel much better about having told him, now."

Valeska smiled at her and held the hand in both hers. "Oh, I only do some of his routine work," she said; "but he often discusses his important cases

with me. I'm sure that he can help you. He is wonderful. I never knew him to fail."

"Miss Wynne," said the visitor, "no one but a woman can understand how distressed I am. I'm sure I can trust you; I can read that in your face. I am always sure of my intuitions. And, now that I have seen you, I'm going to tell you something I didn't quite dare to tell Astro. I know my fiancé is in some trouble. But what I'm afraid of is too dreadful; it terrifies me! Here! look at this! It dropped out of Mr. Cameron's pocket the last time he called, and I found it after he had gone."

She handed an envelop to Valeska, who looked at it carefully and drew out a single sheet of paper. On this was written in green ink:

Be at the Assassins' Saturday at 7. Haskell's turn.

"What can that mean?" Miss Mannering whispered. "I didn't dare to show it for fear of getting Bob into trouble in some way. That word 'Assassins'—Oh, it's awful!"

"May I take this letter?" Valeska asked.

"No, I daren't leave it. Mr. Cameron may miss it and ask for it. But you may tell Astro, if you think best."

Valeska gave another glance at the letter and handed it back. "My dear Miss Mannering, don't worry about it," she said, pressing her hand. "It may not be

so bad as you fear. Whatever it is, Astro will find it out, you may be sure."

WHEN the visitor had departed, Valeska walked into the studio with the news. Astro listened in silence till she had finished; then he smiled, nodded, and took up his water pipe lazily.

"The solution of this thing is so simple that I'm surprised it hasn't occurred to you, my dear. But that's because of your lack of experience and the fact that you haven't read so much as I have. But, all the same, there may be something deeper in it than appears now. At any rate the girl is to be helped, and the Lieutenant as well; and that we will do."

"But what about the 'Assassins'?" Valeska inquired anxiously.

"Oh, that's the whole thing, of course. But I think I'll let you study that out yourself. It will be good practice for your reasoning powers. First let's see if your powers of observation have improved. Tell me all about the letter." He blew out a series of smoke rings and regarded her quizzically.

"Well," Valeska puckered her brows, "it was



"Wake Up, Man!" Cried Astro. "Here! Smell This!"

to call; but sometimes in the middle of the week. At times he talks queerly, almost as if in his sleep, of colors and queer landscapes that have nothing to do with what we are discussing. Sometimes he doesn't even finish his sentences and goes off into a sort of daze for a minute; and then he'll ask my pardon and go on as if nothing had happened."

"And when will you see him next?" Astro inquired.

"He will probably come Saturday afternoon. Usually he stays to dinner; but of late he has been having engagements that prevent."

"All right," said the seer; "I'll see what I can do. Knowing that he is at your house, I shall be able to orient myself and thereby be more receptive to his astral influence. I shall then be able to ascertain the cause of any psychic disturbance."

The young woman, rising to go, looked at him plaintively. "Oh, I hope I haven't done wrong in telling you about it! But I do love him so I can't bear to see him so changed!"

"My dear Miss Mannering," said Astro kindly, "you need have no fear, I assure you. Your business shall be kept absolutely confidential. With the

written on buff laid linen paper of about ninety pounds weight,—very heavy stock, anyway,—in an envelop of the same, postmarked Madison Square Station, April 10, 4 P. M. The handwriting was that of a stout middle aged man who had just had some serious illness,—a foreigner, hard working, unscrupulous, dishonest, with no artistic sensibility."

"Brava! Is that all?"

"No, the stationery came from Perkins & Shaw's. I saw the stamping on the flap."

"Very good. Unfortunately we can't ask there about the Assassins. But perhaps we'll find my ideal criminal after all. The easiest plan will be to follow Cameron to-morrow night. Meanwhile, you had better do some thinking yourself."

Valeska sat down and gazed long into the great open fire, her forehead frowning, her hands working mechanically, absorbed in thought. Astro took a small folding chessboard and gracefully amused himself with an intricate problem in the logistics of the game. When at last he had queened his white pawn according to his theory, he looked over at his assistant and smiled to see her seriousness. In that look something seemed to pass from him to her.

"Oh!" she cried, jumping up, "does it begin with an H?"

"More properly with a C," he replied.

She shook her head and went at the problem again, and kept at it until it was time to close the studio.

THE next afternoon Astro and Valeska waited for two hours across 78th-st. from Miss Mannering's house before they saw the Lieutenant emerge. They had already a good description of him, and had no trouble in recognizing the tall, good looking fellow who at half-past six o'clock walked briskly up the street, ran down the stairs to the subway, and took a seat in a down town local train. Astro and Valeska separated and took seats on the opposite side of the car, watching their man guardedly. At 23d-st. he got out, went up to the sidewalk, and walked eastward.

Beyond Fourth-ave. was a row of three-story, old fashioned brick houses, back from the street. The Lieutenant entered the small iron gate to one of the yards and, taking a key from his pocket, went in the front doorway of a house. It slammed behind him.

"The headquarters of the Assassins," said Astro calmly, his hands in his overcoat pockets, studying the windows.

"And what next?" asked Valeska.

"We'll wait awhile. Come into this next doorway."

On the side of the doorway they now entered was a sign, "Furnished Rooms." It was now after seven o'clock, and had begun to snow. Valeska stood inside the vestibule protected from the weather; Astro waited just outside watching the doorway of No. 109. The 23d-st. cars clanged noisily by, the din of the traffic muffled by the carpet of snow. The open mouth of the subway sucked in an unsteady stream of wayfarers.

Suddenly Valeska put her hand on Astro's arm. "Does it begin with 'C-o'?" she asked.

He smiled. "No, 'C-a,'" he answered.

"Oh, dear, I thought I had it! But don't tell me! I'm sure I'll work it out, though. But it makes me anxious. Anything might happen on a night like this!"

"Yes; even an assassination."

"You don't fear that, really?" She looked at him in alarm.

"But I do,—assassination of a sort. What else could the letter mean?"

She had not time to answer before the door of the next house opened, and a man buttoned up in a fur trimmed overcoat came out. He stopped a moment to raise an umbrella, and they could see that he was a stout, pasty faced German of some fifty years, with a curling yellow mustache. He wore spectacles and seemed to be near sighted.

"There's the man that wrote the letter! Follow him, Valeska! Find out who he is and all that's possible! We must follow every lead."

Valeska was off on the instant, running down the steps and walking swiftly up 23d-st.

Astro lit a cigar, turned up his collar and waited another half-hour in the doorway. Nobody having entered or left No. 109 by that time, he rang the bell of No. 111. A Swedish maid came to the door.

"I'd like to see what rooms you have," said Astro. "The only one is on the third floor rear," she replied, and showed him up two flights of unlighted stairs, steep and narrow, to a small square room, meagerly furnished. Walking to the window, Astro saw that level with the floor was a tin covered roof over an extension in the rear. It stretched along the whole width of the four houses in the row. On this he might easily stand and look into the adjoining windows. Saying that he would move in later, Astro paid the girl for a week's rent in advance, and left the house and walked home.

VALESKA next morning came full of news. "The German kept right along 23d-st. toward Broadway," she said, "and it occurred to me that I might get him to make the first advances, and get acquainted without being suspected. So I passed him, and very gracefully slipped on the snow and dropped my purse. Then I began looking about on the sidewalk for the money that might have dropped out. My German friend came along and offered to help me. It took sometime, and the long and short of it was that we had quite a conversation, and I convinced him that I was respectable. He walked along with me and asked me where I was going. I said that I had intended going to the Hippodrome with a friend; but that I had been detained, and it was so late I thought I'd go home. He proposed having something to eat, and of course I refused. I had to be urged and urged; but the more I refused, the more anxious he was to have me come. Finally, I reluctantly assented to his invitation, and we went to the Café Riche."

"Well, you ought to have seen that German eat,—I mean you ought to have heard him eat! I couldn't eat anything myself; but sipped the wine he ordered and coyly led him on, chattering away about myself ingeniously. I had an engagement with Richard Mansfield and a three years' contract at one hundred dollars a week when he died, and was awfully anxious to get another chance. All the money I had was tied up in one of the defunct trust companies, and so on. He kept on eating, taking the biggest mouthfuls I ever heard of and leaving half of it on his mustache. Oh, I put in some hard work, I assure you!"

"Then he began asking me questions, and wanted to know if I would like to earn some money on the side. Did I? I jumped at it!—five thousand actor folk out of a job this season, you know, and all that. He said I reminded him of his dead daughter,—you know I'm always reminding people of somebody,—and he thought he could trust me. I cast down my eyes and let him go on."

"He said there was a man he knew who had

stolen some confidential papers, and he wanted to get them away from him without publicity. He needed a good, clever woman to help him out on the job. I brightened up considerably. He asked me to go home with him so that he could give me a photograph to identify my victim. I said I would; although I confess I was getting nervous, not being quite sure what he was up to. He had begun paying me compliments, and when a German begins to get sentimental—well, you know!"

"I took the subway with him, and we went up to 126th-st. There was a big apartment hotel there, called the Dahlia,—one of those marble halled affairs that look as if they were built of a dozen different kinds of fancy soap, with a red carpet and awfully funny oil paintings and negro hall boys sitting in Renaissance arm chairs. I refused to go up stairs. Well, after awhile he came down the elevator and handed me this photograph. What do you think?"

She handed Astro a cabinet photograph. He lifted his fine brows when he looked at it.

"Lieutenant Cameron!"

Valeska nodded. "I'm to scrape up an acquaintance with him, get his confidence, and then report to Herr Beimer for final instructions. I wonder what poor little Miss Mannering would say?"

She took off her sables, her saucy fur toque, and touched up her hair at the great Louis XIV. mirror at one end of the studio.

Astro sat regarding the portrait in his hand. He looked up to say, "Did you find out what his business was?"

She whirled round to him. "Oh, I forgot! He's the agent for a big German firm, connected with the Krupps' steel plant. They control the rights to a new magazine pistol. I was awfully interested in machinery, you know. It bored me to death; but I listened half an hour to his description of a new ammunition hoist for battleships."

ASTRO was suddenly impregnated with energy. "Ah!" he intoned. "You didn't remember that the Krupps stand in with the German Government and have the biggest subsidies and contracts in the world? He wants you to make up to a construction officer in the United States navy, does he? He needs a clever woman! I should say he did! Was Herr Beimer sober?"

"Perfectly, so far as I could see, except for his sentimentality. Of course he was a bit effusive, you know."

"Yes, I see. It wasn't his night. It was Haskell's night, whoever Haskell is! But I think we'll have to hurry. This looks more serious than I thought at first. I shall sleep at No. 111 East 23d-st. to-night. And meanwhile I have a nice job of forgery for you, Valeska. I wish you'd practise copying this writing till you can write a short note that will pass for Lieutenant's Cameron handwriting."

He took a letter from a drawer. The envelop was addressed to Miss Violet Mannering. Valeska took it and read it over carefully. It was a single sheet, torn from a double page, and read partly as follows:

I believe that just as everything seems somehow different at night,—when we can see farther than by day: for can we not see the stars?—when our emotions seem freer,—so there are two worlds in which it is possible to exist. One is the dreary every day place of business and duty and pain: the other is free from care or suffering. Don't we enter that occult world at night through our dreams, where there is no such thing as conscience? There are no consequences there. No doubt it's a dangerous place, because it is abnormal: but its exploration is fascinating. Why

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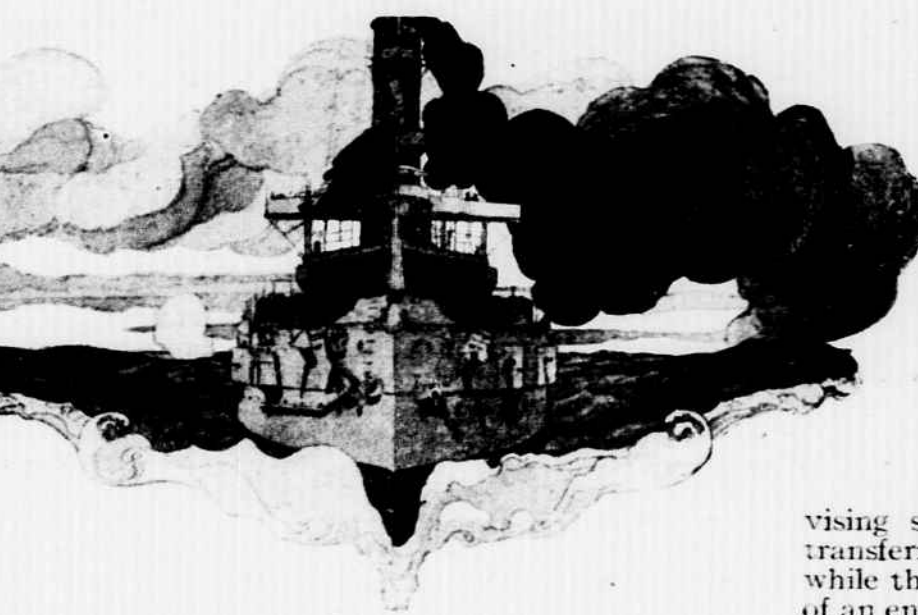
THE END OF COAL IN THE NAVY

By J. E. Jenks

THE United States navy may in the future banish King Coal. Progression in naval equipment and conditions is indicated in no more important way than by the project of abandoning coal and the adoption of oil as a fuel for ships of war. Most of the battleships now carry liquid fuel in their double bottoms,—remote compartments which offer facilities for storage,—and it is expected that within a few years the largest vessels of war will burn oil only.

An effort has already been made by the Navy Department to convert into oil burning craft the five torpedoboat destroyers that are being built under contract; but inasmuch as these destroyers were designed to burn coal, and the alterations necessary to permit the use of oil would involve considerable expense and risk to the contractor, the department was obliged to give up its cherished notion of keeping up with foreign Governments, especially the English, in soon having the improved destroyers.

The ten destroyers provided for at the last session of Congress as part of the increase of the navy, to cost eight hundred thousand dollars each, will be designed in the first instance with oil burning apparatus, and will have tanks for the storage of oil instead of bunkers for the storage of coal. This Government will be that much behind foreign navies; but there was no such thing as bringing the builders of the destroyers now under construction to any such terms as were regarded as reasonable by the naval authorities. Such a proposition applied to



torpedoboat destroyers in course of construction would create all sorts of claims for extra work involved in departing from the original specifications.

The engineers who have this subject in charge are not able to determine just what additional speed will be possible by this substitution of oil for coal; but, in general terms, it is expected that the endurance of a destroyer—that is to say, the radius or period during which it may sustain itself on its own fuel—will be one and one-half times that of a

boat which subsists upon coal. This is an important consideration, and with developments which are suggested in that direction, the use of oil introduces new elements in naval strategy, whereby the destroyer is bound to play an important part in the next war.

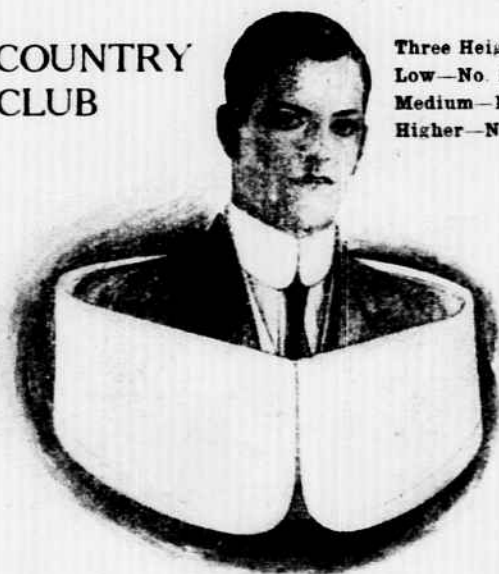
Allied to this decision to put torpedoboat destroyers in the oil burning class, there is presented the problem of supply which will prolong the usefulness of the boat. It will become necessary to establish oil stations at the various naval coal stations. More than that, it will be necessary to have oil tank vessels, after the manner of colliers,—“oilers,” as the English call them,—to deliver the liquid to vessels depending on that article. It furnishes an opportunity for much ingenuity in devising safe and certain means of carrying oil and transferring it to the reserve tanks of destroyers while they are at sea, possibly in the neighborhood of an enemy.

This situation presents a new factor in the maintenance of naval power, and calls for careful consideration in the adoption of facilities that will preserve the mobility of the fighting force afloat.

It is altogether a brand new problem at the time when most people thought the development of navies was rather in the line of increasing displacement, less vulnerable armor, and more powerful guns. There are many questions to be considered, economical as well as military, and the conditions are not without perplexities and perils.

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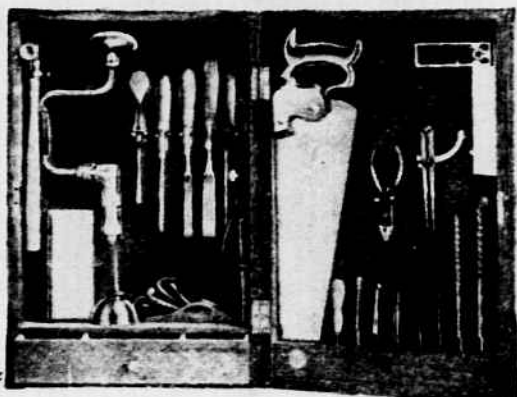


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Nature and John Burroughs

Continued from page 8

ming in their pools. I spent many a boyhood Sunday wandering along their banks. In my pocket I carried a line, and cut a pole in the woodland. Sometimes I returned with trout and sometimes not. Father disapproved of the Sunday fishing; but he was human, and if I brought home several nice trout his reprimand was not severe. The trout appealed to him, and he never refused them as tainted flesh. He wasn't so particular as some persons are about Rockefeller's money.

One thing that stirs my emotion, but which has no associations with my boyhood, is the ocean. The first time I saw it was at Coney Island with Walt Whitman. It possesses for me a great fascination; even more than the mountains have, because I have those with me all the time. I find it a tonic, and it stirs my imagination—the immensity of it always active and unchanging; that primordial water forever pounding on the sand.

From childhood I have been a haunter of rocks. My old home was in a region of rocks, and there were overhanging cliffs that showed great erosion and the effect of long ages. There they stood, and you could see eternity, almost, written in their forms. I liked to sit in the shallow coves, and would fancy that the Indians had been under there; as no doubt they had. One impressive contrast was furnished by the fact that among those scarred cliffs that had been there for millions of years the phoebe birds built their mossy nests in which they laid their pearl white eggs.

There is always a profound appeal to me in the country home or a winding rural roadway. The domestic look around an old farm is a satisfaction. That is why England gives me more pleasure than any other country. It is a land of homes which date back to a remote past and are very suggestive of household delights and joys. New England also has its old homesteads which nestle in their surroundings, mellow, picturesque, and comfortable. They are charming, because man has left his mark on Nature without scarring it or making it artificial; and the human in Nature when harmonious with it is good to witness. One thing that repels me in our West is the newness and rawness of the dwellings and environment; but time may furnish a remedy. The passing years give to the trees and grass some quality that cannot be had immediately. The very look of the earth is different by reason of man's long contact with it.

Don't Study Nature

I LEARNED a great many things about Nature in my boyhood which I didn't know I learned,—gathered a great many valuable facts and impressions. I never studied the birds; I simply loved them. Nature opened her heart to me because I opened my heart to her. I don't have much sympathy with those who go out to the fields deliberately to study Nature. They make a dead set at it for a little, and then go back to their money making or society and the fashions. Yet I suppose they get some good, and I'm glad to

have them do it. There is virtue just in getting the sun tan on their faces, and the earth tan on their shoes.

I once met a town girl that was attending a young women's school who said she didn't care a straw for Nature; in fact, rather hated it. She was a very attractive girl, the brightest student in the school, and wanted my advice about this failure of hers. I told her she had better stick to the things she did love, and that a liking for Nature might come later. "Go out into the country," I said, "and walk, row, and ride. Don't think about Nature, but go to have a good time. Go with your sweetheart, if need be; and let Nature's influences steal in on you. Don't try to daub on a love of Nature; but weave it in with your life and the liking can't help growing."

A Word for Nature Fakers

ANOTHER thing I would say to those who go forth to observe the out of door world is to seek truth and not attempt to fancy that the animals have the thought capacity of human beings. I have always looked for any gleam of intelligence I could find in the wild life, and made as much as I could of it; but when this new school of Nature writers gave me such a shock with their romancing I went the other way pretty fast, though I don't think I have gone too far. I said, "Those fellows ought to be overhauled. I guess I'll have to roast them a little." It sort of woke me up. I shouldn't have minded if they had told what they told as stories. We have had our fairy tale animals and our Aesop's fables for centuries; but the present day creators of fictitious animals must all hang themselves in a purlieu. Their characters are human beings in animal clothing, which reason and act just as we should; yet the authors say in their prefaces, "These things are all true." I couldn't stand that, and thought it was time an example was made of some of them. It wasn't right that people should believe such yarns.

President Roosevelt in his recent criticisms of this class of writers is perfectly sound in his position; and he speaks with authority when he exposes their errors; for he is not only an enthusiastic hunter, but is also one of the most accurate observers I have ever known.

I grant it is hard to write and not overdo, if you attempt a story. You feel that you will hardly get to the mark if you don't overdo. It is seductive. I might not keep within bounds myself, if I were to write stories. But fiction of any sort doesn't appeal to me very strongly. It is too vapory, and rarely seems to portray genuine life. Reality is to me so much better that I want imagination to illumine facts, not to make them over. My love of the real was strong at the beginning, I guess, and it has grown on what I have fed on. In my books I have aimed to portray things just as I have felt them, and if the books have any special merit it is that they make the reader participate in my own feelings.

The Assassins' Club

Continued from page 10

ignore the fact that it exists as a refuge from the worries of matter of fact existence—"

Valeska read it thoughtfully. Her eyes looked through the paper as if into a mist beyond. "No wonder poor Miss Mannering is worried!" she said to herself. She looked at Astro, as if to ask a question. He was busy with a planimeter, calculating the area of a queer, irregular polygon drawn on a sheet of parchment. Seeing his tense look, she turned to her study of the manuscript.

AS soon as it was dark, Astro opened the window of his room on 23d-st. and walked along the crackling tin roof till he came to the first window of the house occupied by the Assassins. Looking in, he saw a small, bare hall bed room, furnished with a cot, a washstand, and one chair. The next two windows were lighted. He approached them carefully. Three men were seated at a library table strewn with magazines. All were smoking comfortably. One, Astro recognized as the Lieutenant, another as Herr Beimer. The third was a yellow faced man with red hair, high cheekbones, and dark eyes deeply set into his skull. In front of him was a plate filled with what looked like caviar sandwiches, cut small and thin.

Herr Beimer said something, at which the others laughed loudly. Then with a flourish, as if drinking their healths, Lieutenant Cameron took one of the sandwiches and ate it almost with an air of bravado. Beimer looked at his watch. The lean, yellow faced man walked out of the room. The Lieutenant took up an illustrated paper and began to read.

Astro tiptoed carefully back to his room, put on his overcoat, and went down stairs, walked over to the drug store, and rang up Valeska at the telephone booth.

"Have you written the letter?" he asked.

"Not yet," was the answer.

"Well, you must do it immediately as well as you can. Bring it to No. 111 and ask for Mr. Silvermann."

He then went back to his room. Another stealthy glance through the windows of the club showed the two still at the table. Cameron was busy with a pencil and a sheet of paper, explaining something to the German.

stairs and, before there was any time for resistance from the astonished German, grasped him by the knees and, pulling his feet from under him, sent him madly sliding down the stairs. Herr Beimer, swearing a polysyllabic oath, stumbled awkwardly to his feet and set off up stairs again after his attacker. But by this time Astro was at the top of the second flight. He dashed into the square room in the rear where he had seen the group of men. It was empty! Beside it, however, was a small hall bed room, and here, in his shirt sleeves, lying in a stupor on the cot, lay Lieutenant Cameron.

Astro sprang to the door and locked it just as the excited German thumped ponderously on the panels. Next he threw up the window and whistled. Then, taking the Lieutenant in his arms he succeeded in carrying him to the window sill. Valeska was already on the roof outside, waiting for him.

"Take his feet!" said Astro under his breath, and so together they managed to get the Lieutenant out on the roof and to the window of the chamber in No. 111. By this time the man had begun to revive and to protest in word and action against his removal. They paid no heed to him, however, and bundled him into the room and on the bed. Then Astro shook him energetically.

"Wake up, man!" he cried. "Wake up now! You can, if you try! Here! Smell this!" He reached for the ammonia and held it under the lethargic man's nostrils.

The Lieutenant turned away his head, coughed, blinked, and partially rose on one arm. "Who are you?" he said, gazing at them in surprise.

"Friends of Miss Mannering's," said Astro.

The Lieutenant shook his head, and stared. "What's the matter?" he brought out laboriously.

"I got you away from Beimer—afraid of trouble—want to help you." Astro spoke very distinctly as if to a deaf man.

The Lieutenant felt for his coat, found himself without one, seemed puzzled, and dropped back again limply.

"The—draw—" his voice ended in a mumble.

"Yes, the drawer! What drawer?" Astro asked eagerly.

"Find draw—" The Lieutenant seemed to drop asleep.

"I wonder what he means? There's something on his mind. No doubt he has hidden something." Astro looked keenly at Valeska under drawn brows.

"Can't you revive him again?" she asked.

"No use trying the ammonia yet. It seems to have too great a reaction and sends him into a deeper sleep. We'll have to wait till he comes to himself for a moment naturally. You know what it is now, don't you?"

She nodded. "And I found it out, curiously, only from the dictionary. I looked up the word 'assassin,' and found that it came from *Hashshashin* or hashish eater. Then I looked up about the Old Man of the Mountain who used to drug his followers with bhang till they would commit any crime, and that led me of course to *Cannabis Indica*, or Indian hemp, and I found out all about the effects of hashish."

"Yes, I thought these amateur Assassins were innocent enough,—only a club to experiment with hashish, for with a moderate dose the sensations are wonderful, and well worth trying—but there's more in this than that. What is Beimer up to? That's what I want to know."

"Is he really unconscious now?" Valeska asked, watching the prostrate form of the Lieutenant as he lay flushed and breathing, but otherwise inert.

"Not really. He may be dimly aware that we are here; but his volition is gone. He won't speak until he rises to the level of volition again. It's a sort of double consciousness, a rhythmic process of alternate sinking into apathy, where he sees visions, and rising into full consciousness when he can talk for a moment. I wish I knew what dose he had. The intervals are about five minutes. I tried hashish when I was in college; but I took such an overdose the last time that I have dreaded to use it again."

THE Lieutenant now began to mutter, as if talking in his sleep. "I'm tottering on the tops of tall pendulums . . . lovely color . . ."

In a tunnel now, twisting, turning, violet green orange . . . floating . . . floating like a spirit . . . tops of tropic trees. . . Suddenly he gasped and sat up, staring hard at them. "What did I say? What was it? Quick! before I go off again! I was saying something."

"Find the drawer," Astro suggested, leaning to him.

"Draw—draw— What was it? Drawings!" he exclaimed. "Beimer wants the drawings! For God's sake help me! I'm losing it again! Drawings! What is it about drawings?"

"Where did you put them?"

"Drawings! Yes. Under the—mat—"

His eyes closed.

Astro tried again. "Under the mat in the little room?"

The Lieutenant stared stupidly. "I forgot. Mat—that meant something. I can't get it. Wait till I come up again. . . . All snaky now, like live wires . . . pink and green. . . . Ah!"

The rest was inaudible.

The moment he had again succumbed to the effects of the drug Astro sprang to the window. He paused there to say sharply:

"Beimer is trying to get some of the Lieutenant's navy drawings, that's evident, and has given Cameron a big dose of hashish to keep him quiet till the papers can be found. I think Cameron must have suspected it and has hidden the blueprints or whatever they are. I'm going to go through that bed room

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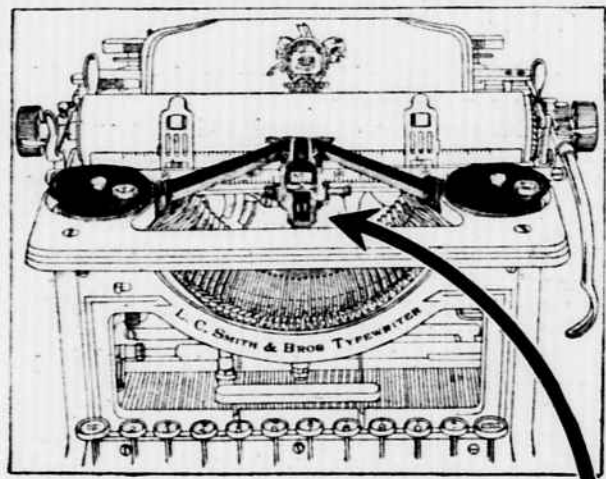
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and see if they're under the mat. You wait here. He is likely to be unconscious for five minutes more now, and I'll just have time." With that, he had leaped out on the roof and was off.

The Lieutenant still muttered in a whisper so low that Valeska could make out nothing. She went to the window just as Astro reappeared.

"No mat, nothing but a carpet. Beimer must have got away with them. You'll have to get after him, Valeska, while I pull the Lieutenant through. If I know anything about hashish, he's had a terrific dose, and is going to have the worst case of nausea he ever had in his life. I took a look at those caviar sandwiches—they were fairly green with the stuff. His first voyage won't be a circumstance to the seasickness he'll have in about half an hour. You get right out to Beimer's place and see what you can do with him!"

AS Valeska threw on her furs the Lieutenant was beginning to arouse again. As she slipped out of the door and ran down stairs, he sat up on the bed, his eyes glassy, his fists clenched. The effort he was making to gain possession of his mental faculties was evident in his writhing mouth and the wild, staring eyes.

"What was it?" he demanded.
"It's all right," said Astro. "Beimer has the drawings; but we'll get them for you." He turned for the glass of water on the table.

The Lieutenant clutched his arm in a fierce grip. "Gods!" he cried. "Help me! The papers were secret plans for gun control. Man, it's ruin for me!"

"You must drink this, first of all," Astro replied, holding the glass to the man's lips. "It's an emetic. We must get this hemp out of your stomach before you can recover."

It was too late. The Lieutenant dropped back, now as rigid as a marble statue, only his wild eyes moving. He spoke painfully through his clenched teeth.

"Oh, God!" he murmured. "Take it away! I can't drink it! I'm going through hell!" His brow was furrowed with tense lines as he fought with the deathly nausea that was working in him.

Astro put down the glass and waited. It was evident that nothing could help now, and the drug which had thoroughly impregnated the man's system must work off its own effects.

"It works so—so fast . . . All black now . . . Oh God! . . . I'm afraid! . . . Afraid!"

He began to moan.

"You're all right; there's no danger. You're just a little sick, that's all."

"I'm dying! It's no use . . . Tell Violet . . . I'm dead . . . Don't you see, man? I'm dead already . . . I'm whirling through space . . . Dead!"

Astro smiled. It was, he knew, a common symptom of an overdose of *Cannabis Indica*. There was, as he said, no danger. He waited for the crisis, attending to his patient like a trained nurse. For awhile the moaning continued; then Cameron began to curse wildly, like a man with the delirium tremens. Then of a sudden he sat up in bed, and the convulsion came. His outraged stomach revolted at the burden it had to bear. During this retch-

ing Astro waited on him kindly, and when the active stage of nausea had passed he lay the Lieutenant back on the bed and waited till he sank into a natural sleep. Then he took a small book from his pocket and began to read.

For half an hour he read the little volume of the *"Morte d'Arthur"*; for another half-hour he sat in a brown study, his eyes fixed on the pattern in the worn carpet. There was a zigzag figure in it which resembled the letter M.

The Lieutenant moaned in his sleep, and felt under his bed mechanically with one hand. Astro's eyes followed him.

Then with his face suddenly illumined, he rose quietly, threw up the window, and passed out on the roof. In less than five minutes he returned with a smile on his lips. He took up the book again and began reading.

IT was after midnight when Valeska returned in great disappointment. She took off her coat and looked sadly at the Lieutenant, who was now sleeping peacefully.

"It was no use," she said. "Herr Beimer wasn't in, and no one knew when to expect him. I waited as long as I dared; for I hated to come back unsuccessful."

"It was too bad I was so stupid as to send you away out there," said Astro quietly. "I should have taken time to think it over, first. It came to me an hour after you had left. Here are the blueprints, safe and untouched."

"Oh!" she exclaimed joyously. "Did he tell you where they were after I left?"

"No, before you left. Didn't you hear him?"

"Under the mat? But I thought you looked and found none there."

"My dear," said Astro, with a whimsical expression on his dark, handsome face, "you should learn to concentrate, to focus your subconscious mind upon itself. The psychic state of receptivity—"

"Oh, bother!" Valeska exclaimed. "Where were they, if they weren't under the mat?"

"Under the mattress," he answered.

THE Lieutenant sat up, now fully recovered, and looked at the two. Astro handed him the blueprints. He grasped them exultantly. For awhile he lay weakly looking at them, saying nothing. Astro put on his overcoat and helped Valeska into her wraps. Just before he opened the door, he turned and said:

"I don't think I need give you any advice, Lieutenant. Go to sleep now, and you'll be all right in the morning. If you have gone through what I did the last time I was an assassin, there is no danger of your ever trying it again. I think that Miss Mannerling needn't know about this, and I shall not tell her."

"What does she know? Did she send you to help me?" the Lieutenant asked anxiously.

"She asked my advice, that's all. Unfortunately she saw the name 'Assassins'; but I think you can explain that easily enough, if you don't care to confess the truth."

"How can I explain it?" Cameron said thoughtfully.

"Why, tell her that the club met to kill—time," said Astro, as he bowed his farewell.

The next Master of Mysteries story, "The Lorsson Elopement," will appear September 27.

FREAK PHOTOGRAPHY

AFTER running horses, jumping athletes, flying cannon balls, flashes of lightning, and the shifting spectral lines of revolving double stars have been successfully photographed, the airy soap bubble has furnished a stumbling block that the scientific photographer has had great difficulty in surmounting.

An eminent scientist said not long ago that for a long time it had been his ambition to photograph a soap bubble in the act of breaking. He anticipated great difficulty, because he knew the time occupied in the disappearance of a breaking bubble must be only a small fraction of a second.

Whoever has watched a brilliant soap bubble burst knows how quickly it vanishes. The scientist thought it might take one-twentieth of a second; but by repeated experiments he found that the time occupied in the disappearance of the iridescent film was not more than one three-hundredth of a second.

To catch and picture one of these vanishing films between the instant of its breaking and that of its complete extinction proved a most difficult undertaking; but it was accomplished.

Some persons may think that it would be equally difficult to photograph a lightning flash; but it must be recollected that lightning makes an intensely vivid impression, while the soft reflection of a soap bubble is evanescent, even in the bright glare of an electric spark.

From printing the image of the flying edge of a broken bubble in the three-hundredth of a second to disclosing the existence of great nebulae in the heavens by the cumulative effect of several hours of continuous exposure, the modern photographic plate is performing many wonders in behalf of science, and proving itself one of the most powerful means at man's disposal to unlock the secrets of nature.

It is possible that the famous Specter of the Brocken may yet have its photograph taken, and so become familiar to thousands who have never seen the mysterious shade itself. It is known that the so called specter is simply the shadow of a person standing upon the mountain, projected on the surrounding mist.

Some years ago an official of the Weather Bureau at Washington, while making meteorological observations on the summit of Mount Washington, used to amuse himself by caus-

ing the specters of night visitors to the observatory to appear in the mist enveloping the peak. For this purpose it was necessary only so to place a light as to cast the shadow of a person on the foggy cloud ahead of him. Sometimes a gigantic specter was produced with startling distinctness, though never any equaling the phenomena seen from the Brocken, where the conditions seems to be peculiarly favorable.

An Englishman has reported to the Royal Meteorological Society the results of similar experiments made by him in the dense London fogs of last year. He succeeded in raising his own specter by placing a limelight back of his head. Then he photographed the specter.

A WARNING

Now curse the Muse!
Her help, so humbly sued for, to refuse,
And leave me sunk in dark despair's abyss,
Sans hope, sans rope,
To turn out rimes like this!
For all of me, she may in regions shady
Prolong her days; I swear she is no lady!

I am a poet!
Confound her airs and graces! she shall know it!
My foolish fellow craftsmen have too long
With praise and bays
Advertised her in song.
Her head is swol'n; yea, proud, defiant doubter,
She soon shall see I'll get along without her!

For, haughty minx,
It does not matter what the critic thinks!
It naught imports if on the witness stand
You swear you ne'er
Gave guidance to the hand
Which writes the rimes that hit the public eye—
The raptured reader only thinks you lie.

So listen here!
I'll scribble screeds like this the livelong year,
And if they meet with scanty approbation,
The Muse accuse
Of all the inspiration;
But if they're liked, I pocket all the credit,
And leave you in the lurch. There, I have said it!

—Louise Betts Edwards



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